

Committee on Government Reform

Wednesday September 6, 2006

John King

Assistant Chief of Police

Montgomery County Police Department

Testimony

On behalf of our Chief of Police, Tom Manger, and the men and women of the Montgomery County Department of Police, I want to thank the committee for this opportunity to discuss our response to gang activity in our community. As with most criminal activity, gang crime does not adhere to any jurisdictional boundary. That is why it is important that our area law enforcement agencies have united to work together to address this problem.

The Montgomery County Police have joined other regional agencies, including the Maryland State Police, Prince George's County Police, and the Maryland Park Police, to work with the ATF on the Regional Area Gang Enforcement (R.A.G.E.) unit. This unit enables each of the participating agencies to not only gather valuable criminal intelligence, but it also gives law enforcement a very effective operational arm.

In our community of Montgomery County we have seen gang membership and gang related crime increase at a steady rate over the last few years. What is more alarming to us is that, from November 2005 to May 2006, we have witnessed a 30 % increase in active gangs (from 20 to 28), a 30% increase in documented gang members (from 680 to 930), and a corresponding 30% increase in crimes attributed to gang members. Most of these crime increases have been in burglaries, robberies and vandalisms.

In the 2nd quarter of 2006 (April, May and June), 24 different gangs were involved in documented incidents in Montgomery County. Three of those 24 gangs accounted for 67% of all reported gang involved incidents. Those gangs were identified as the Crips, Bloods, and MS13. The Crips were involved in 21 incidents, while both the Bloods and MS13 were involved in 18 incidents each. No other gang was involved in more than five documented incidents.

Our intelligence indicates that these Crips and Bloods are not formally associated with their more popular namesakes in California. But the presence of these two groups highlights the importance of our actions on this issue.

In addition to our enforcement efforts, the Montgomery County Police Department is working hard with other government agencies to prevent young people from becoming involved in gangs. Over the last year we have had a significant increase in requests for educational presentations on gang prevention from our schools and our community groups. In addition to providing this education to our general population, we work to identify potentially at-risk kids and work with them and their families.

In our Wheaton community, our Gang Task Force officers and Choices (a non-profit group) work together to help young people who are considering joining a gang. Officers identify these children and then involve the child's parents in the program. A plan is then developed with the assistance of Montgomery County social services agencies to provide "wrap around" services to the family. These services continue for up to six months.

These types of responses are consistent with our community policing philosophy wherein we identify problems and then work with multiple shareholders to provide some solutions.

It is important to note, and thank, the support that the United States Congress has given to us to address this issue of gang activity. With a grant of \$500,000 the Montgomery County Police Department is able to fund six full-time gang investigators who will be dedicated to conducting county-wide gang investigations for a centralized office. These gang investigators will also work closely with our county level partners who include: Health and Human Services; the State's Attorney's Office; Montgomery County Public Schools; the Montgomery County Detention Center; our Educational Facilities Officers; and community based organizations such as Identify, Crossroads Youth Opportunity Center and Choices.

This federal funding from Congress is very important and we are thankful for the assistance. It is having a positive impact on our fight against the expansion of gang related activities.

A special partner of ours is the Prince George's County Police Department. Chief High and his officers have taken a proactive role in facing this challenge head-on and we, the Montgomery County Police, are thankful for their efforts in working with us on a regional level.

The Montgomery County Police Department will continue to be aggressive as we deal with the issue of gang activity and will seek out new initiatives to not only suppress gang criminal acts, but to intervene and prevent young people from becoming members.